[Yamada]

Thus Aza Yamada consisted of seven settlements grouped into six 'han' and into five chinju. The chinju was probably the older, "natural" unit, while the 'han' was a unit introduced by the Japanese administration. 621 [177]

During the last few months before the battle for Okinawa, the area south of Yamada was used as an ammunition dump by the Japanese navy, one small unit was stationed in Tarigaa, and a number of Okinawan civilians drafted for labor were quartered there with the local people. These outsiders dispersed as the raiding by American planes increased and by the time the landing took place, on 1 April 1945, the people of Yamada had for the most part gone into caves and prepared underground shelters. Two or three days after the landing the 6th MarDiv passed through Yamada, discovering some of the people and sending them behind the lines, but missing many. Some of those taken were almost immediately allowed to return to their homes. Then, after about a week, all were rounded up, taken to the school, and there loaded onto trucks and taken to Ishikawa. During the following weeks all the buildings in Yamada that had survived the softening-up process that preceded the landing were burned "as a sanitary measure" with the exception of one house and one school building. A part of the Yamada people were moved again to a village north of Kin while the rest stayed in Ishikawa, which was becoming the largest concentration of civilians on the island. Aza Yamada, empty of Okinawans, was occupied by several American units; concrete foundations for quonset huts were laid on the level fields of Tirabaru; the walls and floor of the remaining school building were removed so as to make a garage for a motor pool. 195 621 726 727

The people of Yamada were permitted to move back to their village during the summer of 1946. Some stayed in Ishikawa, however, and some returned to Yamada only to go back to Ishikawa later. (One woman said they were told at the time that if they did not return to Yamada then they could never return later.) The houses at Yamada had to be rebuilt and fields reclaimed; American aid in materials was given but the job was not an easy one. For some of those who had employment with American units or whose families were too broken by the war to provide the basis for a farming household, the new city of Ishikawa, crowded and unsanitary as it was (and still is), was more attractive than the ruins of the country village. But in addition to those from Ishikawa, former Yamada people were being shipped home from Japan, the South Seas, and Manchuria, and although some of these too drifted to the city, the population of Yamada is now somewhat larger than it was before the war. 195 621 727

The postwar village of Yamada looks considerably different from the prewar one. While the old village consisted of several widely separated settlements, the new one is fairly compact. The center is Ajimaa at the old cross-roads below the school. Yamada 'mura-uchi' is empty but for three families. The yaarui of Uema and Tarigaa were never reoccupied and Tirabaru exists only as a sort of pseudopodium of Ajimaa stretching toward but not reaching its former location. The greater part of the 'mura-uchi' and yaarui people are in Ajimaa and the present Tirabaru. Kuraha, formerly down on the beach, has been rebuilt above the water, just below Ajimaa, at a new and potentially more important crossroads. 621 178 [341]

5) War Experiences Many younger and even middle-aged men saw service in the war, some in Manchuria, China, and Southeast Asia. Their experiences of course varied. One well-educated man told me how pleasant he found Burma and how much he would like to return there as a civilian; he had been in the Japanese Military Government there. Others returned from the war to tell of terrible experiences. One story, which was said to be well-known around Itoman, told how an Okinawan whose unit was making a last stand deserted to surrender to the Americans when he was warned by a friend that as an Okinawan he had been chosen to go into the pot for dinner.

On the home front old people, women, and children were able to see the army at first hand during the last few months before the battle, when many units prepared to defend the island. Many civilians saw the harsh army discipline and saw, we were told, how when army rations became short the officers continued to eat well while the men had to loot from the fields of the civilians. They remember the Korean labor units, some of whom in the south were detailed to cut the Okinawan farmers' trees to build defenses. They also remember the 'Chōsen-P', the Korean girls brought by the Japanese army to serve as prostitutes for the men; some informants believed the Japanese army's system of army brothels to be superior to the policy of the American army.

In general the present Okinawan view of the late Japanese army is not a flattering one. But it must be emphasized that most informants seemed quick to distinguish between the Japanese army and Japanese civilians, army policy and national culture.

6) The Present Scene The Japanese government's present display of interest in Okinawa, as seen for example in the recent granting of pensions to survivors of war dead, the renewed interest of Japanese scholars in Okinawan culture, and the movie industry's "Okinawa boom" have made an impression on the Okinawans. The government's interest may be mainly political; the interest of the scholars, however, is genuine, and the reasons for the movie boom too may run deeper than propaganda considerations. Okinawa was the only part of Japan, the only one of the forty-six prefectures, that was actually defended against a landing. The people of Okinawa were the only Japanese who fought to protect their homeland from invasion. And thus the people of Okinawa-ken showed the greatest heroism of any Japanese. This, potentially, is the argument that may one day raise the status of Okinawans to great heights in the Japanese scheme of things, apart from any conscious policy on the part of the Japanese government. Many Okinawans may be well aware of their latent heroism as a group. What they actually did go through as individuals must not be minimized and may well motivate some to try to derive some reward from it. (I must admit that this is speculation; I have not been told by any Okinawans that they are, or might be considered to be, the most heroic of the Japanese, but I believe that this interpretation is inherent in the situation.)

On the other hand, the differentiating treatment that Okinawans met in Japan in the past is still there too. Recently a volleyball team went to Japan, where, it is said, the first meal served them consisted of bread while the Japanese teams around them were served rice. When they objected they were told that it was understood that the Okinawans had become wholly Americanized